



File Code: 1950
Date: May 6, 2009

Dear Interested Citizen,

Public involvement is an important part of the environmental planning process for the U.S. Forest Service. Please take the time to read the following information and let us know your concerns about the proposed actions and decisions to be made. We appreciate your contribution of time and effort, and believe the information you share with us will lead to a better decision.

On December 5, 2007, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals declared the Hazardous Fuels Reduction Categorical Exclusion (CE-10) developed under the President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative invalid and issued an injunction against further use of the CE-10. The USFS responded to this ruling by applying the injunction nation wide. This has resulted in many projects being halted in various phases of completion, including the projects outlined in this document. The basis for this project is still valid and is described below.

The Greys River Ranger District is proposing to re-analyze and implement hazardous fuels reduction treatments on National Forest lands in the area known as Cottonwood Cabins Fuel Reduction Project. This letter serves two purposes. The first is to request your input regarding the scope of the analysis that we will conduct in complying with the National Environmental Policy Act. The second purpose is to provide you with a description of the proposed action so you may submit formal comments. This scoping and comment period provides those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. Those who provide timely comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

Purpose and Need:

The Cottonwood Cabins Fuel Reduction Project has been identified as an opportunity to reduce fuel buildup on forest lands surrounding five recreation residences adjacent to Cottonwood Lake. The project area includes 3 treatment units, totaling approximately 20 acres.

Treatment in this area would provide a defensible space around the existing structures and allow firefighters to more safely access and suppress wildfires under normal summer burning conditions. An increase in mountain pine beetle activity also indicates that this stand is in a stressed condition, and is susceptible to future beetle activity, beetle-related mortality, and increased fire behavior.

We have identified several objectives we would like to meet. Specifically, there is a need to:

- Provide a "defensible space" around each recreation residence.
- Reduce the risks to firefighter and public safety, as well as to property and natural resources.
- Restore and maintain conditions that represent a properly functioning ecosystem.
- Reduce risks of catastrophic wildfire and insect infestation on forest lands.
- Reduce the density of understory conifers within forested stands.



Proposed Action:

The Greys River Ranger District of the Bridger-Teton National Forest proposes to treat 20 acres in the Cottonwood Lake Recreation Residence Area, approximately 8 miles southeast of Afton. The project area is located in T31N, R117W, Section 31 (see enclosed map).

In order to meet the project objectives, we are proposing the following:

1. Cutting all lodgepole pines trees (live or dead) that are infested with mountain pine beetle AND cutting all standing dead trees. The intent of cutting and removing these trees is to decrease dead fuel loading (and future fuel loading) that could affect fire behavior within the stand.
2. Cutting small diameter (< 8" DBH) conifers that act as fuel ladders to residual trees.
3. Pruning lower branches of large diameter residual trees.
4. Thinning of the stand to approximately 100 sq. feet. basal area (approximately 70 trees per acre).
5. Thinning of 1-3 acres around Slide Lake Trailhead, removing hazard trees, suppressed trees, retaining approximately 100 sq. feet. basal area (approximately 70 trees per acre).
6. Machine piling of slash OR removal of slash, limbs, and tops to the landing. (If machine piling occurs, burning of those piles would be initiated when the piled fuels are dry and weather conditions provide for safe ignition.)

Anticipated volume for this project is approximately 62 CCF. This project would be implemented as early as summer of 2009.

Initial Issues:

We will evaluate whether or not there are extraordinary circumstances. Extraordinary circumstances are those instances that the proposed action could result in significant environmental effect to one or more of the following resource conditions:

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, or species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat or Forest Service sensitive species,
2. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watershed,
3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas,
4. Inventoried Roadless Areas,
5. Research Natural Areas,
6. American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural Sites,
7. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Decision to be Made:

As the Greys River District Ranger and Responsible Official, I will decide whether or not to implement the proposed action. I have made a preliminary assessment that this action falls within a category of action listed in 36 CFR 220.6 that is excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of the category. The specific category is 36 CFR 220.6(e)(12): Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of

temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.

How to Comment and Timeframe:

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of the legal notice in the Casper Star-Tribune. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. You should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Written comments must be submitted to: Jay Dunbar, Greys River Ranger District, 671 N. Washington St., P.O. Box 339, Afton, WY 83110. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone (307-886-5300) or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-bridger-teton-greys-river@fs.fed.us (subject line should specify Cottonwood Cabins Fuel Reduction Project). Comments must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6. Only those who submit timely comments will be eligible to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

If you would like to be included on the Cottonwood Cabins Fuel Reduction Project mailing list, please let us know. Persons not responding to this mailing will not receive further information regarding this particular project. If you wish to participate in this environmental analysis or to be kept informed of the process but are unable to respond to this scoping document, please contact us at the address above. If you have an email address where you can be reached, we prefer to use that format whenever possible. For any other questions, contact Heidi Whitlach at 307-886-5300.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jay L. Dunbar

JAY L. DUNBAR
District Ranger